

The Jasper Crane Rose Garden

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The prospect of restoration work on the Jasper Crane Rose Garden in Brandywine Park offers an excellent opportunity for park enthusiasts to consider the extraordinary intersection of lives that occurred with the creation of that oasis of color at the north end of the Van Buren Street Bridge.

Laid out in 1933, the garden was a Public Works Administration [PWA] project. The National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933, one of the first of the New Deal's "back to work" efforts, created the PWA, which paid unemployed laborers to work on public projects, thus supplying jobs for workers idled by the Great Depression and providing improvements for the city. In addition to working in Brandywine Park, PWA workers put their efforts into the construction of P. S. DuPont High School, the renovation of Wilmington High School, and the erection of an addition to Howard High School.

The oval garden fulfilled what was reportedly a long-held dream of Edgar L. Haynes. A member of the Board of Park Commissioners from 1911, Haynes became its president in 1925, an office he held until 1950. He was president emeritus from 1950 until his death in 1956. Haynes, at one time the owner of the Morning News, began his newspaper career in Wilmington in 1884. After he sold his interest in the paper in 1920, he went on to serve as a director and later vice president of Artisans Savings Bank and director and treasurer of Perpetual Savings and Loan. He was also a director and president of the board of the Wilmington and Brandywine Cemetery Association, a director of the New Castle Mutual Insurance Company, and a director of Memorial Hospital. Called "Colonel" Haynes in his later years, he merited the title because he had served as military aide to Gov. Preston Lee, an appointment that carried the honorary rank of lieutenant colonel.

Before the garden was planned, Haynes and other Park Commissioners studied public park rose gardens in several other eastern cities. It was little wonder that they sought the help of J. Horace McFarland as they started putting their ideas down on paper. McFarland had founded the

American Rose Society in 1892 and served as its first president. He also had the advantage of living relatively nearby, in Harrisburg. By the time McFarland was invited to participate in the garden planning process, he had already produced several books on gardening and rose cultivation-Laying Out the Home Grounds, My Growing Garden, The Rose in America, Modern Roses, and What Every Rose Grower Should Know. He was also the editor of The American Rose Annual. In addition to his gardening interests, McFarland, a master printer, is probably best remembered as an active advocate on behalf of city planning, the establishment of the National Park Service, and the preservation of renowned natural areas such as Yosemite and Yellowstone parks.

While the federal government paid for the labor, the Board of Park Commissioners supplied the other materials required, with the exception of the roses themselves. DuPont Company vice president, Jasper E. Crane donated all the original 670 plants of 58 different varieties. The garden's designers arranged the beds so that 400 more roses could be planted "when funds are available."

Jasper E. Crane joined the DuPont Company in 1915 when DuPont acquired the Arlington Company, for whom he worked. In 1927, he was elected a DuPont Company director and by 1929 had risen to a vice presidency and a place on the DuPont Executive Committee. Although he retired in 1946, he remained a company director until 1964.

A civic minded individual, Crane served as a director of the local YMCA and Red Cross, chaired the state's Temporary Emergency Relief Committee in the 1930s, and headed Delaware's Finnish Relief Campaign in 1940. His enthusiasm for gardening led to his contribution of the roses for the garden in Brandywine Park, a happy combination of his concern for out-of-work Wilmingtonians with his interest in horticulture. His own garden was characterized in news reports as "a showplace."

The collaborative work in Brandywine Park was a great success. In 1946, the American Rose Annual published by the American Rose Society, referred to the Rose Garden as "splendidly kept." The publication characterized the garden as having "an atmosphere of quality, dignity, interest and repose." At its height in the 1950s, the garden had 1,000 plants and 100 different varieties. In 1950, three award winning roses were planted in the garden: "Sutter's Gold," "Capistrano," and "Mission Bell." In 1951, the garden was recognized for its award winning varieties of roses. A year later, another trio of award winners found a home in the park: "Vogue," "Helen Traubel," and "Fred Howard." Later new varieties included "Heat Wave," "Green Fire," and "Ruby Lips."

Over the years, the garden suffered from neglect, as park resources were directed elsewhere. During the 1990s, the then Friends Society of Brandywine Park undertook some care of the garden, assisted by faithful and enthusiastic volunteers. Within the past year, however, the Curran Foundation created by descendants of Jasper Crane has donated \$5,000 for restoration work on the garden and the Curran grant has been matched by an equal amount from the City Park Trust Fund. As visitors enjoy the colorful blooms in the year 2000, it is a happy thought that the connection with Jasper E. Crane, the garden's original benefactor, has been renewed.